

The History of Catholic Education in British Columbia, 1847-1900

by Edith E. DOWN, S.S.A.

University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.

The development of Catholic education in what is now British Columbia, can be divided into three time periods:

1847-1900 the pioneer period.

1900-1970 the expanding years as a result of a large volunteer service of clergy, brothers, and sisters.

1970- the present structure now being formulated as a result of:

- the established roots.
- the desire of Catholic parents to continue this form of education.
- the financial assistance of the British Columbia government which, at the present, is lessening the burden and which is helping to assure the future of Catholic education in this province.
- the Church's persistent stance on its being an essential part of the Christian education of youth.

It is interesting to note that the early missionaries had a sense of purpose, that we may not be aware of in our present society. In going into underdeveloped countries for the purpose of raising the standard of living and improving a way of life for the inhabitants, government officials and missionaries had to consider the immediate needs of the people. In order of priority, these were water, nutrition, and then education. In the

establishment of an area like British Columbia neither the government nor the church had any concerns about water. This land overflowed with rivers and lakes. For nutritional needs, our waterways and our forests abounded with fish and wildlife. The missionary, therefore, was not concerned with a “hungry” population.

The adventurers who came West were drawn by the lure of wealth and pleasure. They were desirous of making money from the vast resources; they wanted to spend money under a climate that promised ease and enjoyment. The demands, therefore, of the early population was for education.

This immediate need was for schools for children of the Hudson’s Bay Officers, naval officers, and coureurs de bois. From this influx of settlers, the native people experienced changes too great to comprehend. They, too, sought help to education their children.¹

To His Excellency, Bishop Modeste Demers, belongs the credit of establishing the foundation of Catholic Education in this province. He also carries the distinction of being the first priest to celebrate Mass on the mainland of British Columbia, on October 14, 1838, at the Big Bend in the Upper Columbia River.²

Previous to Modeste Demers’ appointment as first Roman Catholic Bishop to the See of Victoria, on November 30, 1847, Vancouver Island had heard of the faith through the other zealous sons of the Church. When Spain set out on her explorations of the Pacific Coast, she was wont to carry on her vessels one or more Franciscan monks who looked after the ships’ crews. The monks also sought to evangelize the natives who dwelt in the vicinity of the various settlements and trading posts which the Spaniards founded at different points. Thus, in 1789, the Franciscan missionaries reached Nootka. The two Chaplains, Don Jose Lopez de Nova and Don Jose Maria Dios, together with four Franciscan Brothers, and the members of the crew, planted a cross and named the land for Spain.³

¹ Theodore, Sister Mary Theodore, S.S.A., *Heralds of Christ the King*. Kennedy and Sons, N.Y., 1939, pp. vii-viii.

² Morice, A.G. C.M. L., *History of the Catholic Church in Western Canada*. Volume II. Toronto, Musson Book Co. Ltd., 1910, p. 297.

³ Schoefield, E.O.S., *British Columbia*, Volume I. S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., Vancouver, B.C., 1914, pp. 135-145.

Another Spanish Franciscan, Padre Magin Catala, spent over a year in Nootka. The Island at the mouth of Nootka Sound perpetuates the name and it was mentioned in 1792 in Galiano's chart.⁴

The occupation of Nootka by the Spaniards lasted only six years. Padre Gomez, who succeeded Magin Catala, left after the British claim was settled in 1795, when Spain withdrew.

One hundred years elapsed before a second Catholic Church was erected on the Pacific Coast. No signs remain of the fort and buildings erected in 1789 by the Spanish at Nootka. Nevertheless, Reverend J.A. Brabant, who was named in charge of this area seventy-five years later, has left us an account of his findings. He claimed that Spanish numbers could be counted and Roman Catholic forms of worship and Christmastide customs such as the procession to the crib were still carried out. The Indians could point out the position of the Government house, the Chapel, and the burial grounds.⁵

There is no authentic record of the Franciscans' work in Nootka nor of any Catholic priest having visited British Columbia from 1795 until 1838 when Bishop Demers reached the Big Bend of the Columbia River. Father P.J. De Smet, s.j. came to the Rocky Mountain country in 1840 and 1841, where he visited and instructed the Kootenay Indians.

At this period in history, the boundary between Canada and the United States had not been determined.⁶ The western territory was under the dominion of the Hudson's Bay Company, and the western missions were under the jurisdiction of Joseph Signay, Bishop of Quebec. At the request of Canadians of the Wilamette Valley in the Oregon Country to have a priest in their midst, Bishop Signay appointed Francis Norbert Blanchet and Modeste Demers for that part of the diocese of Quebec which is situated between the Pacific Ocean and the Rocky Mountains. This appointment was accompanied by specific instructions to:

- evangelize the natives.
- bring Christians into line with Church teachings.
- spread the gospel.

⁴ Walbran, Captain John T., *British Columbia Place Names, 1592-1906*. Government Printing Bureau, Ottawa, 1909, p. 85.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 361

⁶ Morice, A.G. O.M.I., *History of Northern British Columbia*, Toronto, William Briggs, 1904, p. 224.

- study the Indian languages and prepare a grammar.
- baptize and substitute lawful marriage for irregular unions.
- establish schools and catechism classes to ensure the Christian education of youth.
- plant crosses in all remarkable places.⁷

Father Norbert Blanchet left the Governor's house in Lachine, Quebec, and met Father Modeste Demers at the Red River Settlement. They were in company with Chief Trader James Hargraves, whose canoes and packhorses carried the express of the Hudson's Bay Company from Montreal to Fort Vancouver.

In a letter to his brother, Father Demers describes part of his precarious journey through the mountains:

For nine days the horses went through mire and bog, there they sank up to their sides in dreadful places, climbed 300 feet up the side of mountains, then down again, then up the slope of a mountain more than one thousand feet, perpendicular as the side of a house, everywhere trees down, that the horses had to jump over. Other than that all went well...⁸

Although they left Montreal on Thursday, May 3, 1838, they did not reach their destination at Fort Vancouver in the Oregon Country until the 24th of the following November. Immediately both priests set themselves to carry out the recommendations of Bishop Signay. In 1842 Father Demers accompanied a Hudson's Bay caravan which took him from Fort Vancouver to Forts Stewart, Fraser and Babine in northern British Columbia. He became acquainted with various Indian tribes and learned their dialects. On his return trip, he visited the Indians at Fort George, Kamloops, and Fort Langley.

In the meantime, with colonization to the west increasing, the fur trade in this sector of the Hudson's Bay Company's vast storehouse began to

⁷ Blanchet, Rev. F.N., *Historical Sketches of the Catholic Church in Oregon*, Catholic Sentinel, Oregon, 1978, pp. 7-8

⁸ Demers, Modeste, Letter to his brother St. Francis Xavier Mission, Cowlitz Prairie, Oregon, Provincial Archives, Victoria, B.C.

shift north of the mouth of the Columbia River and changes had to be made. Doctor John McLoughlin, Superintendent of the Columbia Fur Department, had as his able assistant, Chief Factor James Douglas. When this department was facing a period of reorganization and adjustment, Governor George Simpson named Douglas Chief Factor at the new post on Vancouver Island.

In 1843, when the expedition of twenty-two men left Fort Vancouver for the new post, Reverend Father J.B.Z. Bolduc, a new arrival from Quebec, was invited to accompany them. Having the consent of the Vicar General, Reverend Father N. Blanchet, he left for Nisqually, where the steamer Beaver was waiting.

Fortunately, the Reverend Father Bolduc left us the description of this event. It would seem that he was a man similar in temperament to Sir James Douglas. There was a kinship in their admiration of the vast, silent beauty of the Pacific shores; there was the same steel for adventure in the face of savage Indians. Father Bolduc tells us:

...the eighteenth was a Saturday. I consecrated it to the erecting of a temple for celebrating the day of our Lord. At sunset I possessed quite a vast edifice whose sides of fir branches rose majestically and whose roof was covered with awning from the steamboat. Some of the men of the expedition came to visit and compared it to the tabernacle that Israelites raised in the desert.

Finally Sunday morning, an hour after sunrise, I prepared for Holy Mass. Already more than 1200 savages of three different nations were assembled around our modest temple. Our commander, a religious, man, although a Protestant, arrived on the spot, as well as some Canadian. It was in the midst of this numerous meeting that our holy mysteries were celebrated for the first time.⁹

Unfortunately, Father Bolduc could stay only a few days, his orders being to return to his mission post on a certain date. He left in an Indian canoe, carrying with him, as he states, a souvenir of the many acts of

⁹ Bolduc, J.B.Z., *Mission de la Colombie*, Québec. J.B. Fréchette, p. 13.

kindness extended to him by Chief Factor Douglas and also by C. Brotchie, captain of the steamer Beaver.

According to Reverend Father Adolphus Van Nevel, Father Bolduc administered the sacraments to the French Canadians. Also he preached Christianity to crowds of wondering Indians.¹⁰

There is no record of the Catholic Church in British Columbia after that until the creation of the Diocese of Vancouver Island. By Apostolic Bulls, dated July 24, 1846, the Vicariate Apostolic of Oregon was transformed into an ecclesiastical province, comprising the Archdiocese of Oregon City, the Dioceses of Walla Walla and Vancouver Island. To the latter See, on November 30, 1947, the Right Reverend Modeste Demers was consecrated.

The limits of this diocese were changed on several occasions. In fact, there are four different periods which may be considered. The original boundaries included the whole of the present province of British Columbia and the Russian territory to the Arctic. By Apostolic Brief, dated December 14, 1863, the mainland of British Columbia was erected into a separate Vicariate Apostolic under the jurisdiction of the Right Reverend Louis J. D'Herbomez, O.M.I., who on October 9, 1864, was consecrated Bishop of Melitopolis. This reduced the diocese of Vancouver Island to its present confines, namely, Vancouver Island and several adjacent smaller islands.

In 1867, the United States purchased from the Russian Empire, the territory of Alaska for \$7,200,000.00 in gold. Prior to this, the Catholic priests were forbidden by the laws of Russia to sojourn in Alaska. When on June 29, 1873, the Right Reverend Charles John Seghers, successor to Bishop Modeste Demers, was consecrated Bishop of Vancouver Island, he was also given by the Holy See, charge of Alaska. This, inclusive of the Aleutian islands, added a territory of 590,804 square miles to the jurisdiction of Bishop Seghers. Finally, by decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda on July 17, 1894, the territory of Alaska became a Prefecture Apostolic to the administration of which Reverend Pascal Tosi, s.j. was appointed. Thus the diocese of Vancouver Island was again reduced to its present boundaries. How the diocese became an archdiocese in 1903 and how, since 1908, it ranks once more as a suffragan See, belongs elsewhere.¹¹

¹⁰ Van Nevel, Reverend Father Adolphus, *A Retrospect*. Original manuscript. Archives of St. Ann's Academy, Victoria, B.C., 1913, p. 7.

¹¹ Original documents. Diocese of Victoria. Bishop's Palace, Victoria, B.C.

At the time of the consecration of Bishop Modeste Demers, on November 30, 1847, Fort Victoria, first of the Hudson's Bay forts on Vancouver Island, had been established only four years. After the Treaty of Oregon in 1846, it became the headquarters of the Company on the Pacific Coast.

Archbishop Herbert Blanchet relates in his "Sketches," that Bishop Demers, as first Bishop of the territory west of the Rockies, in what is now British Columbia, was without a priest at his disposal. Even by the end of 1853, he had as yet "neither a home nor a modest chapel to use as a cathedral."¹² Therefore, in 1847, shortly after his consecration, he had left for Quebec and Europe in search of recruits to assist with the work in this frontier diocese.

Because of the slow methods of travel, and the revolutionary rconditions in France at the time, Bishop Demers did not return to Victoria until September 1852 to take possession of his diocese. He brought with him three priests and a subdeacon, all of whom played an important role in the early missionary activities. They included Reverend L. Lootens, Reverend Pierre Marie LeLanier, and the subdeacon, Pierre Louis Deygert.¹³

At this particular time in the history of the Catholic Church in British Columbia, the subject of the Catholic School comes into focus. Since Catholic teaching concerns the education of the whole man, the school is always found, when possible, near the Church. Therefore, it is not surprising that such an establishment was found as early as 1849, in Victoria.

During the absence of Bishop Demers in Europe, the spiritual interests of the Catholics of Vancouver Island were under the care of the Reverend Honore Timothy Lempfrit, O.M.I.¹⁴ This zealous missionary was a native of Lixheim, France. He had served as chaplain in the reserve French Light Infantry in 1828 and had participated in the expedition to Algiers in 1830. On returning to France after 1832, he spent some time in a Carthusian monastery. He joined the Oblate Order in February 1847, and received his appointment to eastern Canada in September of the same year. In September 1848, he left for the Oregon country, where, in the diocese of

¹² Morice, A.G., O.M.I., *History of the Catholic Church in Western Canada*, Volume II. p. 282.

¹³ Official records. Bishop's Residence. Victoria, B.C.

¹⁴ Blanchet, Archbishop N., *Sketch XXVII*, p. 144.

Archbishop N. Blanchet, he was under the Reverend P. Ricard, O.M.I., Oblate Vicar of the Oregon Missions.¹⁵

In one of the Colonial reports of Sir James Douglas there is this reference:

... 16th. While on the subject of schools, it will interest you to learn, that Father Lempfrit, a Roman Catholic missionary of the religious order of "Oblats", having been deputed by the Archbishop of Oregon City to prosecute his ministry among the natives of Vancouver Island, was received in this establishment and is now in addition to his missionary labours, conducting a promising school, composed of the wives and children of the Company's Canadian servants, who derive great benefit and are rapidly improving in respectability, under his zealous instructions. The Reverend Father boards with us but has hitherto received no other support from the company.¹⁶

Father Lempfrit received his appointment on March 29, 1849. He was in the diocese by May 4th of the same year, but did not take up permanent residence until his arrival on June 6, 1849 in company with Sir James Douglas and his family.¹⁷

In another letter to his Superior, Reverend P. Ricard, at Nisqually, dated September 14, 1849, he states:

...I have begun my school, they gave me a sort of shed where I live and where I have put up an altar.¹⁸

In yet another letter to the same, dated November 1, 1849, he says:

¹⁵ Archives, Missionari Oblati Di. Maria Immacolata, Via Aurelia 290 Roma (629), Italia.

¹⁶ Douglas, Sir James. Letter to the Governor. Deputy Governor and Committee in London, dated Victoria 27, October 1849. H.B. Archives, London, England, A.II/72/f, 177d.

¹⁷ Fort Victoria Post Journal, June 6, 1849. H.B.C. Archives, B. 226/a/I/.

¹⁸ Lempfrit, H.T., O.M.I. Letter to Reverend P. Ricard, September 14, 1849. Archives Deschâtelets, Ottawa. Folder No. Oregon I a-VI, 3. Translation.

...among my pupils I have six who are receiving lessons in writing and arithmetic. I noticed one day that you had many little slates for learning how to write, would you please send me a few as well as some slate pencils.¹⁹

In another letter, written to the Grey Nuns of Montreal on February 9, 1850, who evidently provided him with some essentials for his church, he writes:

... We arrived here on June 6th. The fort was truly crowded and they could give me a lodging only after a few days. Since there was no church, I was obliged to set up my chapel²⁰ in a large shed at the edge of the water. But since it was too far from the fort, I obtained a place where I was able to set up a more decent chapel and to start a little school. For on arriving here I found the poor children of our French Canadians in the deepest ignorance, not knowing even how to make the sign of the Cross. I announced that I was going to take charge of their instructions without at the same time neglecting my poor Indians. From the beginning I have had from 20 to 25 pupils. Lately, I have fewer because several have gone to other forts.

I think that within a short time they will build me a house outside the fort, where I shall be freer, since the poor Indians are a bit fearful and since nearly all our French Canadians are living outside (the fort).²¹

From these foregoing excerpts it can be concluded that sometime after June 6, 1849, Father Lempfrit started his school.

Whereas the Reverend R. Staines and Mrs. Staines, the Anglican colonial teachers from England, arrived in Victoria on March 17, 1849, there is no evidence in the Hudson's Bay Archives as to when their school commenced.²² It is definite, however, that classes were in progress before

¹⁹ Ibid., Record No. Oregon a-VII, 3.

²⁰ From the map of the H.B.C. Fort, 1850, with further reference to this shed, it would be the salmon storehouse no. II.

²¹ Lempfrit, N.T., O.M.I., Letter to the Grey Nuns of Montreal, February 9, 1850. Deschâtelets Archives, Ottawa. Oregon No. 2, v-1, 2.

²² Reynolds, R.A., Secretary to the Hudson's Bay Co., London, England, Letter to Sister Mary Margaret, January 31, 1961. Archives, Sisters of St. Ann. Victoria, B.C.

January 23, 1850, which was the date that the school building in the fort was officially opened to students.

From the Hudson's Bay files dated October 27, 1849, Sir James Douglas states:

...14th. The school is not yet numerously attended as we have not had time to get all the children collected from the distant posts of the Interior; we expect to have 34 pupils when they are all assembled, but we have at present only 15, who are making progress in learning under the able tuition of Mr. and Mrs. Staines, who I am happy to inform you, are attentive and give much satisfaction as teachers...²³

From a study of the Lempfrit letters available and from the replies to a questionnaire sent to the Hudson's Bay Company London, England, the writer would conclude:

1. That after June 6th and before July 13th, 1849, a Catholic school was in operation at Fort Victoria.

2. That there is no evidence in the Hudson's Bay records as to the exact date of the opening of Mr. Staines' school, but that it was prior to October 14, 1849.

3. That Mr. Staines received a stated amount, 340 pounds plus 100 pounds for the support of the school from the company.²⁴ Father Lempfrit, on the other hand, relied on the generosity of his parishioners.²⁵

4. That despite the fact that Father Lempfrit boarded at the fort, sat at the same table as Mr. Staines "with much mutual cordiality" and taught the children of the Company's Canadian servants, there is no record of any financial assistance given him, although recompense was considered.²⁶

5. That Catholic Education in British Columbia commenced simultaneously with that established in the Hudson's Bay Fort in 1849, in

²³ Douglas, Sir James, Report to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, London, Victoria, October 27, 1849. H.B.C. Archives, London, England, A 11/72/fo. 177-177d.

²⁴ Letter of H. T. Lempfrit to R.P.P. Ricard, O.M.I., Deschâtelets Archives, Oregon 1, a-vi-3.

²⁵ Barclay, Archibald, Secretary, Letter to Sir James Douglas, December 31, 1852.

²⁶ Lempfrit, H.T., O.M. L, Letter to Father Ricard, November 1 1849.

July, which was evidently the accepted month of the opening of the school term.

Evidently Father Lempfrit continued his school in the priest's house which was eventually built by the Company outside the fort, until October 8, 1851, when he went up to Cowichan. Records show that sometime after May 1852 he left for Oregon. In September 1853, he sailed for France from San Francisco.²⁷ Father Lempfrit's departure from Vancouver Island is understandable in light of the fact that he was a member of a religious order and that he had been loaned to the diocese of Victoria in the absence of Bishop Demers. The Oblate Order, of which he was a member, was not established in the diocese until 1858 when it took charge of the church at Esquimalt. Records of the government and the church refer to Father Lempfrit as an intelligent and zealous missionary.²⁸ Father Lempfrit left the Oblate congregation in 1853, and spent some time at Saint-Ines, California before sailing for France (1853) where he returned to the Carthusian monastery. He was made curé of Veho 1856-1860. He died at Morville-les-Vic on January 8, 1862.

Father Lempfrit's establishment of a school in 1847, stands out as the first Catholic school in this province. (It is the hope of the author that with the present up-swing of Catholic schools in British Columbia, his name will be perpetuated on the façade of some Catholic Educational Centre.)

On the arrival on April 15, 1851 of the two priests from Europe who preceded Bishop Demers, there is no evidence that the Catholic School was continued.²⁹ In Bishop Demers' Report to the Propaganda in Rome, September 10, 1854, (See Prop. XVI, 1104-1110) he deplored the fact that there is no school in his diocese.³⁰ Then, in the census of Vancouver Island taken by Sir James Douglas in 1855, Table II,³¹ there is still no mention of a Catholic School.

In a report of the Reverend Edward Cridge, however, Colonial Chaplain, addressed to the Governor on November 30, 1856, there is this reference:

²⁷ Moresby, Fairfax, Record Office Transcripts. H.B.C. Vol. 721-725, 1822-1852, p. 337. Provincial Archives.

²⁸ Records. Deschâtelets Archives. Oregon 1. a-vi-3.

²⁹ Records of Sir James Douglas, April 1851. Provincial Archives.

³⁰ Report to the Propaganda. Rome, September 10, 1854. Deschatelets Archives, Ottawa.

³¹ Colonial Office Library, London, England, Lib/11/10.

...Two boys have been removed (That is from the Colonial School) and placed at the Roman Catholic School lately established at Victoria.³²

At that time, this school would probably have been conducted by the clergy. In the Provincial Archives, however, there is a reference in an unofficial note, to a Dr. O'Shea, a teacher and ex-miner, who lived several months with Bishop Demers.³³ Mention is also made of this teacher in the *Orphans' Friend*, March 1904. With reference to the first Log Cabin Convent the excerpt reads:

... It was vacated by the teacher, Dr. O'Shea upon the arrival of the four pioneer Sisters of St. Ann in 1858...³⁴

Again, in an article by Williard Ireland, Provincial Librarian, there is this information:

...One of the earliest Frenchwomen to arrive in San Francisco was Mme. V.C. Pettibeau who is remembered there for her activity in the field of education. In fact, in conjunction with two other women in 1853, she opened the first girls' school in that city... She transferred her activities to British Columbia in the early months of the Gold Rush and for a time, at least, taught in the school instituted by Bishop Demers.³⁵

Therefore, it is evident that between 1849, when the first Catholic School was established in British Columbia, until the arrival of the Sisters of Saint Ann, on June 5, 1858, Catholic Education in British Columbia was more or less sporadic. From this latter date, however, until the present, its continuity can be traced.

³² Report of Reverend E. Cridge, Colonial Chaplain, to the Governor, November 30, 1856. Provincial Archives, Victoria, B.C. Folder No. 395. No. 1.

³³ Provincial Archives, Victoria, B.C., H. B. Sa 21.

³⁴ "St. Ann's Convent and Young Ladies' Academy," *B. C. Orphans' Friend*. Victoria, B.C., March 1904, Vol. 1, No 4, p. 6

³⁵ Ireland, Willard, "The French in B.C." *B.C. Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XLI, No. 2, Victoria, B.C., April 1949, p. 7.

If twenty-five institutions of Catholic education can be counted prior to 1900, two factors made this possible. In the first place, the clergy assigned to the area, came with the intent of laying the foundation of the faith. These men were educated in seminaries mainly in Quebec, France and/or Belgium. They had specific recommendations from their Bishops and leaders of religious congregations to carry out, not only the conversion of the Indians and settlers, but also the christian education of youth.

History records the establishment of these educational institutions under the auspices of the Catholic Church. The early demand for education was sparked by the Caribou Gold Rush of 1858. To deviate momentarily, but to emphasize the demand... in 1857 Modeste Demers went to Eastern Canada to search for recruits to assist him in his diocese. Victoria was the centre of the Crown Colony of Vancouver Island, which still had many aspects of a Hudson's Bay post. The Catholic population consisted mainly of employees of the company and their half-breed children. His Excellency was concerned over the lack of educational facilities for them and also he was anxious to care for the native children. This was the situation in 1857 when Bishop Demers left for Montreal. When he returned a year later, an excerpt from Sister Mary Angele's diary states:

...Our surprise was no less great than the Bishop's. The fort had become a town in his absence. Some 200 neat-looking houses had been erected and beyond these stretched a sea of tents. We had been told that some twenty, bark-roofed cabins housed the few people who had made their homes near the fort and that was all. The Caribou Gold Rush of '57 and '58 had made the changes.³⁶

When four Sisters of St. Ann arrived, they were housed in a log cabin that became their first school. Students included Elizabeth Williams a California gold seeker's daughter, the daughters of the Governor, Alice, Agnes, and Martha Douglas, Emma and Henrietta Yates, the half-breed orphan, Emilia Morrell, and some colored children.

The story of that little school has been written. Its problems of funnelling the select students, the natives, the orphans and the colored children were among the major dilemmas confronting the Bishop. Furthermore, at that time in history, Church schools usually had segregated

³⁶ Gauthier, Sister Mary Angele, S.S.A., Journal 1958. Archives of the Sisters of St. Ann, Victoria, B.C., p. 12.

classes. From the earliest days of Catholicity in Victoria, the boys had not had advantages parallel to those of the girls. The boy's day school had been maintained by the zeal of the clergy. In order to provide Catholic education for the boys, Bishop Demers gave up a room in his residence. The overtaxed priests gave their precious time to a very small group of students.

In 1863, the Bishop had erected a brick building and gave the Oblate Fathers the management of it. Reverend Father Cyrille Beaudre was the first principal. His staff included Father J. McGuckin and Brother E. MacStay. It was named St. Louis College after Louis Joseph D'Herbomez, O.M.I.³⁷

By 1864, the increased population not only of Victoria, but also of the mainland, called for the creation of a new diocese. Reverend Louis J. D'Herbomez was elected to the Vicariate apostolic of British Columbia. His See was erected in New Westminster.

Slowly the Oblate Fathers who had been working on the Island were called to the mainland to fill the needs of the new Vicariate. By 1866, their work in the Vancouver Island Diocese came to an end.

To compensate for the loss of the Oblate Fathers, the diocese of Vancouver Island in its need won the sympathies of the American College of Louvain, Belgium. This institution, founded in 1859, by two American Bishops, had as its purpose to enable American born ecclesiastics to pursue the course of theology in Europe and, at the same time, to afford young men of European nationalities an easy means of preparing for the work of the ministry in America. The co-operation of the Victoria Diocese was repaid a hundred-fold for Louvain College had given it two Archbishops, Most Reverend Charles Seghers and the Most Reverend Bertram Orth; two Bishops – the Right Reverend J.B. Brondel and the Right Reverend N.J. Lemmens, in addition to sixteen priests. It was during the life span of these clergy that the Church established roots on Vancouver Island and its influence was strengthened by the establishments of institutions for “the christian education of youth.” Clerical names that contributed and shaped the Church and schools of that time included John J. Jonckau, A.J. Brabant, J.M. Leroy, A. Van Nevel, and J. Leterme. This last priest was principal of St. Louis College, Victoria, for sixteen years.

At this period also, during the formation of what was eventually to become a province, the religious order of Oblate Fathers of Mary

³⁷ *The Orphans' Friend*, Historical Number, p. 18.

Immaculate were an important influence in the Church's development. This religious group of men was founded in France by Eugene de Mazenod. The story of their movement from France, to Eastern Canada to Fort Vancouver Oregon, to the Victoria Diocese, and finally for the period of time covered by this paper, to the mainland of what is now British Columbia, has been written.³⁸

When the diocesan and religious clergy were struggling to maintain the foundations of the faith, a third segment of influence at this time were the Sisterhoods. The religious women, who were recruited by Bishops Modeste Demers and Louis d'Herbomez and his successor, Bishop P. Durieu, assumed a major role for Catholic educational instruction in this missionary country.

These included :

- in 1858, the Sisters of St. Ann, Lachine, Quebec.
- in 1890, the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity, of Refuge, Ottawa, Ontario.
- in 1894, the Sisters of Charity of Providence, Montreal, Quebec.
- in 1896, the Sisters of Child Jesus, Le Puy, France.

Having established the beginnings of Catholic Education, the chronological dateline (see Appendix) is indicative of the expansion in the first fifty years. Because of the diversity of settlers, an attempt was made from the start to meet their needs. The desires, however, were often greater than the possibilities.

In the first few years Catholic Education was confined to Vancouver Island generally, but specifically to Victoria which was the centre for the Hudson's Bay Company, the naval base at nearby Esquimalt, an Indian village and an influx of miners, traders and attracted settlers. The early beginnings saw whites, Indians, boys, girls, blacks, orphans and the elite side by side in what were rudimentary classroom facilities. As the town grew and expansion up the island and to the mainland progressed, more distinct lines were drawn. Perhaps the greatest advance came with the

³⁸ Whitehead, Margaret. *The Caribou Mission*, Victoria, B.C. Sono Nis Press, 1981, pp. 11-38.

development of residential educational institutions for the native children. When British Columbia became a federated province in 1871 education of natives came under federal jurisdiction. A provincial department of education was formed for all other educational requirements. The management of most Indian residential schools was assumed by the Oblate Fathers which included the position of principal. Instruction was carried out by the clergy, lay brothers, and the Sisters.

Because the clergy were overtaxed and their numbers did not warrant their taking on the responsibility of the school system, education in the white Catholic schools for girls became the prerogative of the Sisters. From 1858 to 1890 the only congregation was the Sisters of St. Ann. At that period in history this group of women, founded in Vaudreuil, Quebec, in 1852, had a flourishing foundation. Bishop Demers requested their assistance. From 1858 these religious women voluntarily held the torch and laid the foundation of a Catholic educational system. In this pioneer time span covered by this period, they manned the girls' white schools at the elementary and high school levels and were instructors in four Indian residential schools. Boys were registered in elementary schools. In most cases the grade and high school were owned and operated by the religious congregation but they also served in the Indian residential schools and in the established parochial schools. By 1890 the Sisters of Providence commenced instruction in the St. Eugene's School in Kootenay, B.C. and the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge had an orphanage in Sapperton, B.C.

The Sisters of St. Ann have gone down in history as the "Pioneer Nuns of British Columbia: the first four numbers were:

Sister Mary of the Sacred Heart,

Valois Sister Mary Angele Gauthier

Sister Mary Lumena Brasseur

Sister Mary Conception Lane

The development of a curriculum in the first ten years relied mainly on the background of the instructors and the availability of materials. A study of the textbooks in use at the time indicates that they were purchased through Hibben's Bookstore, Victoria, B.C., which supplied text books to

the Hudson's Bay Fort School. Their contents included prose, poetry, nature study, history, geography, physiology, botany, chemistry and philosophy. Senior students learned current and modern history with such adjuncts as chronological codes and charts, physical and political geography as well as astronomy. A study of one's own language was an important subject. Contests in syntax were conducted so frequently that correct grammar was the rule. Composition held an honored place, memory was cultivated by learning excerpts from the classics. Also, penmanship was well taught.³⁹

Early prospectuses give the account of the various subjects included. Religion was an important subject in every school and the clergy directed its content and focus. Materials were available through the clergy and religious contacts of Europe and Eastern Canada.

As early as 1864, St. Louis College for boys included the following in its course of instruction.

Greek and Latin Classics

Philosophy – Logic, Metaphysics and Ethics

Physical science, Astronomy, Botany, Chemistry, Mineralogy

Mathematics, Algebra, Geometry, Trigonometry

Arithmetic, writing, bookkeeping

Ancient and modern history

Geography and use of globes

Modern language, French and Spanish

Drawing

Music, vocal and instrumental.

The story of the progression of Catholic education from 1858-1900 has been written. It had its roots in this territory prior to the establishment in 1871 of the Provincial Department of Education. After that date schools

³⁹ Down, Sister Mary Margaret, S.S.A., *A Century of Service*. 1858-1958., Victoria B.C., Moriss Printers, 1966, p. 48.

adopted the curriculum of the province. Before this time, they had been using the curriculum of the Ontario School System.

By 1900 seven of the Schools had completed elementary classes and one, two or three years of high school. By 1891 students were writing the first grade eight examinations set by the department of education.

Public examinations were in vogue at this period and this became an annual affair in all St. Ann's Schools. High commendation of results are recorded.⁴⁰

Schools that can claim to be the first in their particular area of the province are:

St. Ann's, Duncan, B.C. – 1864

St. Joseph's School, Williams Lake, B.C.– 1867

St. Marc's School, Kyuquot – 1880

Pioneer Catholic Schools that can boast a century of educational service to the province are:

St. Ann's Academy, Victoria, B.C. – 1858-1958

St. Ann's School, Duncan, B.C. – 1864-1964

St. Louis College, Victoria, B.C. – 1864-1964

St. Ann's Academy, Kamloops, B.C. - 1880-1980

St. Ann's Academy, New Westminster, B.C. – 1865-1965

St. Mary's Mission, Mission City – 1867-1967

The first school of art established in the west was at St. Ann's Academy, Victoria, B.C., 1858, and as other St. Ann's Schools were established, art was incorporated. An early prospectus indicates that crayon, oils, china painting and water color were included.

⁴⁰ Examinations at Saint Ann's Convent School. "*The British Colonist.*" Thursday, July 25, 1861, p. 3.

By 1892, the first commercial school was established and lessons were being given in typing and shorthand. Domestic science was also included. From there coping with the needs of the time was extended to all St. Ann's Schools in the province, as well as the boys schools under the Oblate Fathers.

One factor that provided stability to both Indian and most white schools was the added feature – the boarding school. This made it possible for students from outlying parts of this vast country to receive the available educational offerings.

The clergy, lay brothers, sisters and lay teachers that manned the schools at this important historical moment of time were exceptional. Their sacrificial life in the name of Catholic education was a contribution that has made possible what our present potential now boasts. The clergy and lay brothers who were well educated for those times were eager and foresighted. The sisters were among the most independent and self-reliant of the early women settlers. The convents attracted a strong-willed and resolute breed. They separated themselves from the general run of the society on their own volition to commit their lives to the christian education of youth. These unsung heroes and heroines planted the roots of Catholic education in this province.

The early colonial schools were actually sectarian institutions under the control of the Church of England. The report drawn up on August 27, 1861, by Mr. Cridge for submission to the Governor pictures religious instruction on scriptures as the principal subject studied.⁴¹

In order to meet the problem of supporting the Church of England as well as the established schools in 1854 the minutes of the council for July 12 show an appropriation of 500 pounds "towards finishing the Church."

Such a tax on the limited financial resources of the young colony, as was occasioned by the attempted establishment of a State Church, aroused public protest; and this abortive attempt exerted considerable influence in determining the nonsectarian character of the systems of education later established in British Columbia.⁴² In spite of this occurrence the Catholic Church maintained the unique character of its schools.

⁴¹ Short and Doughty, *Canada and Its Provinces*. Archives Edition, Vol. 22, p. 401.

⁴² MacLean, Donald Alexander, Ph. D. *Catholic Schools in Western Canada*, pp. 25-26.

There is evidence that the first Catholic schools in British Columbia did not receive exemption from taxation from the Hudson's Bay Company nor in 1858 from the Crown Colony. In 1865, a letter from the Colonial office of London, England gave a negative response to a request for school tax exemption by Bishop D'Herbomez.⁴³ As the diocesan clergy, the Oblate Fathers and the Sisters of St. Ann assumed the administration of schools, their respective organizations funded and assumed individual corporate ownership of the educational establishments. As previously mentioned, the administration of Indian residential and day schools became the responsibility of the federal government under the administration of the Oblate Fathers.

This concludes the first phase of Catholic education in British Columbia.

⁴³ Letter from colonial office to Bishop D'Herbomez. (Wood).

APPENDIX I
CATHOLIC EDUCATION CHRONOLOGICAL DATELINE
1847-1900

1. 1847 Salmon House H.B.C., Fort Victoria, B.C.
Priest's House 227, lot 25, block
2. 1858 St. Ann's Log Cabin School, Victoria, B.C.
3. 1859 Broad Street School, Victoria, B.C.
4. 1860 View Street School, Victoria, B.C.
5. 1863 St. Louis College, Victoria, B.C.
6. 1864 St. Ann's School, Duncan, B.C.
7. 1865 St. Ann's Academy, New Westminster, B.C.
8. 1867 St. Mary's Indian Residential School, Mission City, B.C.
9. 1867 St. Joseph's School, Williams Lake, B.C.
10. 1870 St. Louis College, New Westminster, B.C.
11. 1871 St. Ann's Academy, Victoria, B.C.
12. 1876 St. Joseph's Hospital, Victoria, B.C.
13. 1880 St. Ann's Convent, Nanaimo, B.C.
14. 1880 St. Marc's Mission, Kyuquot, V.I.
15. 1880 St. Ann's Academy, Kamloops, B.C.
16. 1888 St. Ann's Academy, Vancouver, B.C.
17. 1890 Indian Residential School, Kamloops, B.C.
18. 1890 Our Lady of Charity of Refuge Orphanage, Sapperton, B.C.
19. 1890 St. Eugene's School, Kootenay, B.C.
20. 1891 Indian Residential School, Kuper Island, B.C.
21. 1894 Songhees Indian Reserve School, Victoria, B.C.
22. 1894 St. Paul's Hospital, Vancouver, B.C.
23. 1898 St. Mary's School, Dawson City, Y.T.
24. 1898 St. Aloysius Protectorate, Victoria, B.C.
25. 1899 Christie Indian Residential School, Meares Is., V.I.

APPENDIX II

BISHOPS OF THE VICTORIA DIOCESE 1846-1899

Bishop Modeste Demers 1846-1871

Bishop Charles John Seghers 1873-1879

Bishop Jean-Baptiste Brondel 1879-1883

Archbishop John Seghers 1885-1886

Bishop John Nicholas Lemmens 1888-1897

Bishop Alexander Christie 1898-1899

BISHOPS OF NEW WESTMINSTER DIOCESE 1864-1899

Bishop Louis J. D'Herbomez O.M.I. 1864-1890

Bishop Paul Durieu O.M.I. 1890-1899

Augustine Dontenwill O.M.I. 1899-1908.